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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 2nd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 9 February 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. WARD (Canada)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 1993 REGULAR SESSION (continued)

(c) CHAIRMAN'S PROPOSAL ON BOARD PROCEDURES (continued) (E/ICEF/1993/CRP.6)

1. Mr. BAILEY (Australia) said that, while the measures proposed by the Chairman in document E/ICEF/1993/CRP.6 for rationalizing and streamlining the work of the Executive Board addressed many of his country's concerns, his delegation agreed with Sweden that section 4 of the document on consideration of country programme recommendations should be revised. However, more significant changes would need to be considered at a later stage in the light of wider restructuring of the United Nations development system.

2. Mr. OVANESOV (Russian Federation) and Mr. SIEBER (Switzerland) supported the very useful recommendations made by the Chairman in section 4, which they felt could be adopted without prejudging the outcome of the General Assembly's discussion of restructuring.

3. Mr. FILHO (Brazil) said that he endorsed the proposals regarding the reduction of documentation (sect. 1) but that he shared the reservations expressed by a number of other delegations about setting rigid limits on the discussion of policy themes, as proposed in section 2 (a). As the recent debate during the organizational session of the Economic and Social Council had made clear, such an approach could create more problems than it solved. He would also like further information on how the choice of themes would tie in with the biennialization and triennialization of documents recommended in section 1 (d).

4. Brazil supported the recommendation in section 3, which would allow the Board to retain its right to adopt, at each session, such resolutions as it saw fit. The electronic transfer of documentation (sect. 5) deserved full support, although more information would be welcome. The consideration of country programme recommendations need not be postponed since it was stated explicitly that the proposed new procedures would be subject to the restructuring exercise. The Chairman's very constructive proposals in section 4 should all be given serious consideration. It would be especially useful to have the Programme Committee meet during the Board session to discuss only policy issues, while the Committee's intersessional meetings would deal with individual country programmes; this would benefit small delegations which had difficulty with parallel meetings during Executive Board sessions.

5. It would be helpful to have further information on the timetable for implementation at the April session of all the Chairman's recommendations, so that the Board could decide whether there was any point in discussing certain of the proposals at the current stage.

6. Mr. TANTOT (France) said that, while his delegation had always felt that the Board functioned well, the expansion of UNICEF activities necessitated a greater degree of discipline in the Board's methods of work. With regard to the Chairman's recommendations in section 1 of the conference room paper, France, like others, favoured documents that were more concise and action-oriented, but it also expected documents to be made available in all working languages at the same time, so that UNICEF could work at peak efficiency. Similarly, interpretation in all languages should be available at all meetings, even informal ones. It was deplorable, for instance, that the extremely important progress report on the implementation of the Bamako Initiative (E/ICEF/1993/L.6) was unavailable in French, even though the item was of the highest priority.

7. The question of better methods of work, while important, was relatively less urgent, although his delegation agreed that section 4 of document E/ICEF/1993/CRP.6 needed further discussion. There again, until the French version of the multidonor evaluation of UNICEF referred to in the first paragraph of section 4 was available, France would be unable to participate.

8. Mr. ATABEKOV (Observer for Kyrgyzstan) said that he took issue with the Swedish delegation's comments at the previous meeting on section 4 of the Chairman's recommendations. In his own country, as in many others, medical care was still an urgent priority. Also, the reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on technical assistance to developing countries showed how necessary it was to continue assistance through the country programmes, and therefore their consideration should not be postponed.

9. Mr. ETEFFA (Ethiopia) agreed that generally the Board should not become involved in micro-management of UNICEF activities, except where it was a matter of budgeting or efficiency. It was absolutely necessary to reduce documentation. With regard to the agenda, consideration of a short list of issues would make for greater effectiveness, but the selection of items should reflect the priorities and needs of the beneficiaries. The question of the electronic transfer of documentation was an important one, but more information was needed on the number of countries in a position to make use of such technology and the percentage of the UNICEF membership that would benefit.

10. Mrs. ESPINOSA (Observer for Mexico) said that she favoured considering only a limited number of items at each session, but that the issue was not just one of quantity. The criteria for the selection of items must also be studied.

11. It would be difficult to enforce the recommendation in section 3, because it was not easy to limit the Board's decision-making powers. Her delegation believed there was a consensus on the need for detailed study of the recommendations in section 4. Although in principle Mexico favoured instituting the electronic transfer of documentation, more specific information was needed.

12. Mr. BULL (Liberia) said that he agreed with most of the Chairman's recommendations but that those in sections 2, 4 and 5 needed further discussion and some clarification, in order to ensure that the proposals adopted were not inimical to the interests of certain regions lacking the necessary resources.

13. Ms. MBIMBI (Angola) said that her delegation had the same reservations regarding the electronic transfer of documentation that had been expressed by the representatives of the United Republic of Tanzania and Senegal at the previous meeting.

14. Mr. WILLIAMS (Secretary of the Board), replying to questions posed concerning the recommendations in section 5, said that the technical and financial analysis of the electronic transfer of documentation referred to could not begin unless the Board itself gave approval for it at the current session. A number of delegations had raised questions regarding the capability of permanent missions in New York or government offices in capital cities to take advantage of the new technology. The Board would have to decide whether it wished to start with countries that already had such a capability or wait until many more countries acquired it. The General Assembly as well was looking into the issue and its decision must be taken into account, since UNICEF was basically dependent on the United Nations Secretariat in the area of documentation.

15. The CHAIRMAN observed that Canada had conducted an experiment to determine the technical feasibility and costs of an arrangement for the electronic transfer of documentation such as the one being proposed and its findings might be of interest to the members of the Board.

16. Ms. MOLSON (Canada) said that Canada had established electronic links between its capital and UNICEF along the lines envisaged in section 5 of the Chairman's recommendations and had succeeded in sending and receiving information electronically. It was now pursuing receipt of Executive Board documents attached to the electronic messages it was currently receiving. In addition, it was pursuing electronic connection between its mission in New York and UNICEF, and when it had more information it would be happy to share it with the members of the Board.

17. Miss DIOP (Senegal) asked whether UNICEF or Canada would be expected to bear the costs of such transfers. Since the electronic transfer of documentation would benefit very few countries, her delegation's preference was that the proposed technical and financial analysis should be done before any decision was taken.

18. Ms. MANSARAY (Sierra Leone) observed that Canada's experience suggested that the system was already working and could be expanded. However, she supported the position of the Senegalese delegation. A statement of comparative costs would be needed.

19. Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH said, with regard to limiting the agenda to a maximum of two major policy issues at each session, that she supported the position taken by Nicaragua at the preceding meeting against such limitation and in favour of flexibility. Costa Rica favoured the recommendations in section 4, particularly the one in paragraph (b). It believed that a broad analysis would be necessary before a decision could be taken on the electronic transfer of documentation proposed in section 5.

20. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Board should continue its discussion in an informal meeting.

21. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 3.55 p.m.